

Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder

Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs

In January 2011, Governor Bill Haslam appointed Many-Bears Grinder to be the Commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs. Colonel Grinder became the first woman in the state to serve in this capacity.

In order to accept the appointment, Grinder retired from the Tennessee Army National Guard as a Colonel with more than 35 years of service. She is an Operation Enduring Freedom combat Veteran, having served in Afghanistan as the Head of Secretariat for the International Police Coordination Board.

Grinder holds a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies from the Army War College and a Master's Degree in Human Resources Development from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Grinder was inducted into the Fort Benning Hall of Fame in 2004. Her military awards include the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star Medal.

As Commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs, Grinder is responsible for the operation of TDVA field offices, claims office, and four (4) state Veteran cemeteries. She is also an ex-officio voting member of the Tennessee State Veterans Home Board, the governing body for the Tennessee State Veterans Homes that oversees the operations of the three (3) existing Homes, and future location sites.

Under her leadership, the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs' focus is on "Everything Veteran". Among the goals for 2014 is to increase the efficiency of Veterans claims, improve customer service and awareness of the State Veterans Cemeteries through technology and additional interment options, and promote the impact of Veteran Treatment Courts and the resources to help Veterans struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues. The TDVA is creating partnerships to decrease Veteran unemployment, working to increase the number of Veterans with college degrees, improve access to Veteran business resources, and finding solutions to prevent Veteran suicides.

Commissioner Grinder is a member of numerous military and Veterans associations, and is the Vice President for the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) Southeast District. In September 2013, United States Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki appointed her to the VA Advisory Committee for Minority Veterans, to provide guidance on the needs of minority Veterans regarding health care, rehabilitation benefits, compensation, outreach and other programs administered by VA. In November 2013, Governor Bill Haslam formed a Veterans Education Task Force, of which Commissioner Grinder is Chair, to evaluate how to best serve Tennessee's Veterans seeking a certificate or degree beyond high school.

A native of Salt Lake City, Utah, Grinder moved to Tennessee in 1989 where she met and married her husband, Ernie Grinder.